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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7851
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS MANAMA 000302

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/SEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: OUTREACH TO DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

REF: A. 07 STATE 88465

[1](#)B. 07 MANAMA 713

[1](#)C. 07 STATE 108924

[1](#)D. MANAMA 49

[1](#)E. STATE 44903

[1](#)1. (U) Embassy Manama maintains regular contact with democracy and human rights activists and NGOs in Bahrain, and encourages leaders in government and in opposition to persist in the revival of parliamentary politics and other reforms that King Hamad launched in 2002. To the best of our knowledge, there are no active third country dissidents exiled to or receiving asylum in Bahrain.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Since our last report on democratization outreach (ref B), Emboffs maintained frequent contact with individual oppositionists and activists. Group meetings included a February, 2008 roundtable discussion for civil society activists, hosted by Ambassador; DCM hosted a roundtable meeting with leaders of opposition parties. Embassy highlighted publicly the liberalizing reforms associated with the FTA; for example, on April 8, Bahrain TV aired an interview with Ambassador on the topic. Embassy Manama regularly meets with members of parliament and activists from all legal parties, except for several Sunni Islamist politicians who decline meetings with USG officials as a matter of policy. Post is also in contact with several groups that are not in compliance with Bahrain's laws on the registration of political groups; these include Nabeel Rajab of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, and Mohammed Almaskati of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights. Sheikh Ali Salman, the leader of the largest Shi'a party in parliament is one of the Embassy's most important contacts. Ambassador last met with Ali Salman April 30.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Bahrain Institute for Political Development (BIPD) signed an MOU in July that allowed NDI to resume work in Bahrain. NDI has since returned repeatedly to conduct parliamentary training. The next session is scheduled for the end of May. NDI has told the embassy privately that it is satisfied with the level of cooperation received from BIPD and that it believes the arrangement is working well.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Embassy Manama supports a robust array of MEPI programs. In ref B, post described the MEPI grant to the Bahrain Human Rights Society that allowed it to publish its own human rights report. That report will be released at the end of May. The Bahrain Women's Union signed a contract with MEPI in which it agreed to partner with the Institute of International Education's West Coast Center in order to implement the Women in Technology program. Freedom House, operating under a MEPI grant, recently signed an MOU allowing it to open a research office in Bahrain to facilitate its

advocacy of a new family law. Embassy Manama anticipates that MEPI will award four additional small grants in Bahrain to improve the legal framework for the environment, address domestic violence, increase awareness of trafficking in persons, facilitate youth advocacy, and build capacity within civil society.

15. (SBU) Starting in November, 2007, post's Public Diplomacy section persuaded a leading Arabic-language newspaper to run monthly columns by Ambassador Ereli in which he highlighted U.S. views on political reform, among other issues. As part of post's outreach to Bahrain's Shi'a, Ambassador and emboffs attended Ashura commemorations in central Manama in January, 2008.

16. (SBU) Since last year's response, Bahrain has experienced recurrent small street clashes between Shi'a youth and security forces. Some of those arrested and charged in connection with riots in December 2007 have alleged mistreatment at the hands of the police. Emboffs have maintained regular contact with the lead defense attorney for the detainees, with prosecutors, and with NGOs that monitor and report on the case.

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